

WRITING DEVELOPMENT

In her book, *The Writing Revolution* Judith Hochman tells us that students' problems with reading comprehension, as well with writing essays, occur because they have not been taught systematically to write ... to which her book gives a step-by-step guide.

The Writing Development exercises here are adapted from her programme.

Problems in Nicholas II's Russia

7. Questions

One of the biggest problems for GCSE students is sticking to the question.

When I was at school, I was made to write in capital letters ATBQ: 'Answer the Bloody Question!' And when I was a teacher, I used to say to my pupils: "At the end of every paragraph, look at the question, look at what you have written, and ask yourself: 'Am I still answering the question?'"

One neat trick when you are planning your answer is to think of different ways to phrase the question.

If I want to go to York, for instance, I can ask: 'How do I get to York?' But I could also phrase the question: 'In what ways can I get to York?' 'What are the directions to York?' 'Which roads lead to York?' 'In what different ways can I travel to York?' 'Which is the best way to get to York?' ... and that is before I start asking sub-questions like: 'How long will it take?' 'How much will it cost?'

Each different way of asking the question helps me understand different aspects of my answer, and clarifies what it is I have to describe/explain.

Before you put pen to paper, you MUST be sure that you understand what the question is asking, and what you need to say to sufficiently answer that question.

This following exercise will work best if you do it with a friend, and talk about it as you do it.

AQA students: think of as many different ways you might ask the following AQA-style questions:

4. Describe two problems faced by Tsar Nicholas II's government in ruling Russia up to 1905.
5. In what ways were the lives of Russians affected by the Tsar's government before 1905?
6. Which of the following was the more important reason for the weakness of the Tsar before 1905:
 - Russia's backwardness
 - the Tsar?

NOTE!! You do not have to answer the questions. Be careful also that you are not actually devising different questions – your task is to think of different ways to ask the same question.

For each question, when you have run out ideas, discuss: 'what have we learned about the question from this exercise?'